

OCOTILLO WELLS DISTRICT

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Blowsand Reader

VOLUME 14

ISSUE 1

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Is It Spring Already?!

By Garratt Aitchison, District Superintendent

Each riding season seems to come and go so much faster these days. I suppose that is due in large part to the fact that we love what we do. My family and I recently returned from a 2,000-mile road trip through California into southern Oregon. We had plenty of time to reminisce about the places we have lived and worked over the years, from the snow-capped Sierras to the southern California beaches to the majestic redwood forests. While each place holds special memories, none have quite measured up to what I have experienced here in the deserts of southern California. The passion of the OHV user groups and stakeholders, the camaraderie of staff, and the leadership and support of the OHMVR Division are unmatched. I made a similar statement during a recent OHMVR Commission meeting, essentially showing my gratitude toward past and current Commissioners and Division leadership for allowing me to be part of such a great program. During that Commission meeting and tour of the Ocotillo Wells District, it was evident from the public and the Commissioners' comments that all of the hard work and teamwork in the District is paying off. While there is always room for improvement, the overriding theme of the comments was positive. The cleanliness of the parks and diversity of the District programs were mentioned several times. Clean restrooms, riding opportunities, and conservation are at the top of our list, and it shows. Great season, everyone! Now go and enjoy your summer.



Youth Campers Become Part of the Past...

By Jan Naragon, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

A dozen well-appointed tents sprouted up behind the Discovery Center picnic area on January 13, 2018. Their inhabitants, along with several families in hard-sided rigs, spent the next two days considering mysteries, myths, and cultural relics of the distant past at our fourth annual Kids Adventure Connection. Twenty-two youngsters ages 3 to 14 spent that Saturday and Sunday digging into the hows and whys of archaeology under OW's modified version of the California's Outdoor Bill of Rights.*



A quick survey of the kids' favorite pastimes that weekend spanned the whole program, from boulder-hopping and searching for petroglyphs at the nearby Mine Wash Kumeyaay village site, to eyeballing the Seven Sisters constellation through the 11-inch Celestron telescope on a marvelously clear night. Kids constructed crop mark plantings—small models of buried archaeological structures and the patterns of plants that reveal their existence below. They developed jigsaw puzzles based on southwest Native American pottery designs and designed their own

pictograph pots and petroglyphs to take home. Teams of kids and parents learned to take compass bearings to find replicas of historic artifacts on a treasure hunt. If that wasn't enough, there was time for RC rock-crawling, silly songs, Frisbee tossing, and the "ever-slopular" s'mores by the campfire.

Interpretive staff members are always happy to see kids (who might have appeared quiet and shy in the morning) making friends and playing imaginative games by the end of a long day. The average age of kiddos was around seven years this year. Says program director Sharon Weil, "This year represents a turning point for



(Continued on next page...)

...for a Weekend



who our repeat attendees are. Some of our experienced campers are now old enough to be helpers and volunteers, and the little ones



will get to know one another as they grow in the next few years at camp.”

Interpretive staff would like to thank the parents who participated, and also seven volunteers who helped with the cat-herding, meal service, and other duties as required! Many other passers-by are now on track to sign their kids up next January. All in all, friends, fresh air, and fun translated into many treasured moments for participants and staff.

**This document encourages activities that bring all children opportunities to play in a safe place, explore nature, follow a trail, camp under the stars, plant a seed, connect with the past, tread safely/lightly, take a trail ride, and explore the night sky.*



Geology Daze

By Danielle Jackson, Senior Park Aide and Geology Days Planner

Ocotillo Wells SVRA celebrated its 9th annual Geology Days. We commenced this event on the Presidents' Day holiday weekend with multiple hands-on and visual activities to feature not only the world's geological wonders, but also how geology has carved and shaped the park we know today.



We kick-started the event on Saturday, February 17th, in front of the Discovery Center with various mineral and rock specimens, along with volcano, earthquake, and flash flood demonstrations. We explained how wind and water erosion occurs in our Pumpkin Patch, and even acknowledged the geology in our solar system. Our visitors enjoyed being able to create their very own rocks with Starburst candy, as well as sliding halves of chocolate cookies past each other to further understand how the San Andreas Fault moves. Kids piled up toy cars and RVs on a wooden board with wet dirt and watched in awe as a flash flood model took place. Nearby was a vehicle that experienced a flash flood in our park. Junior Rangers

took over our Discovery Center, eagerly prospecting through chocolate chip cookies to learn about minerals and the process of mining.

As always, our friends from The Borrego Rock and Gem Club set up beautiful rock specimen displays, and cut over 100 geodes for children and Junior Rangers during their programs. We would like to especially thank them for their help.



Throughout the weekend, we took displays to Gas Domes, where we talked more about volcanoes, earthquakes, plate tectonics, and faults. Visitors were eager to shake our earthquake model demo, as well as to take on the challenge of assembling our plate tectonic map puzzle. Overall, our event this year was a gneiss success, and we look forward to sharing the tradition with our rock star visitors for years to come.

Newest Junior Ranger Extraordinaire

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

Eleven-year-old Violet Carroll of Lake Perris is the newest member of the elite group of youngsters to earn the sought-after and very coveted mammal bandana. She did so by attending more than 36 Junior Ranger programs at Ocotillo Wells SVRA!

The 6th grader, who loves history and attends the California Military Institute in Lake Perris, has been attending Junior Ranger programs since she was 4 years old. Violet would sit quietly with her mom and dad as older sister Lily participated, waiting for her turn to become a Junior Ranger. When that day came, the rest **WAS** history!

Violet's ambition is to become a pastry chef, but in the meantime, she keeps busy with her love of art, the Girl Scouts, karate and her trips to Ocotillo Wells to camp and ride her ATV with her family.

When asked what she enjoys the most about Junior Rangers, she said it is the cool things she gets to do. Her favorite activity was dissecting owl pellets because she actually found a rodent skull. She also loves the fact that she now camps and rides with new friends she has met in the Junior Ranger program!

CONGRATULATIONS, VIOLET!!!!



Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari

By Jeff Price, State Park Interpreter I

Once again, tens of thousands of off highway vehicle enthusiasts traveled to Ocotillo Wells SVRA from all over the United States for the 56th Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari. This two-day event brings together visitors from diverse backgrounds, OHV preferences, and age groups. One thing they all seem to have in common is a love for their families, their desert, and their sport.

As you can imagine, an event like this requires teamwork and cooperation—from the event coordinators and core staff, to the Ranger and the Maintenance crews on the front lines. All the departments working together this year (and in years

past) have made the

56th iteration of this event a clear success.



Photo by Danielle Jackson

Interpretive Senior Park Aide Jan Naragon adjusts the solar scope, so visitors can safely look at the sun.

made it to the provided dumpsters, and answered many visitors' questions as they went about their duties during the event.

Our Trails team worked with the Ranger staff and Interpretation staff to make sure that all of the signage was in great shape for the event. This allowed visitors to



Photo by Danielle Jackson

A family of visitors learn about the slithering snake from Interpretive Senior Park Aide Seher Khan.

In the run-up to the start of the event, our Maintenance team worked on several projects to make the park ready and welcoming to our visitors. Fire pits were cleaned out, restrooms were painted, and ramadas were in tiptop shape for the attendees to enjoy. Working closely with the Maintenance staff was our Housekeeping team. They provided clean restroom facilities, made sure that refuse



Photo by Danielle Jackson

Two young visitors enjoy our RC Tread Lightly!® experience while learning OHV conservation techniques.

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Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari *continued...*

know where they were, and at what they were looking while at several locations. The Trails team also partnered with our Natural and Cultural Resources staff to pinpoint sensitive resources and provide barriers for their protection during the event. Resources staff was also instrumental in the approval of this year's route for the TDS Safari, pre-running the entire course and providing their valuable insight to protect our park's resources.

Our park Interpretive staff gave just over 2600 visitors a peek into the secret life of the desert. Programs included a timeline of desert denizens, past to present, and a flash flood safety display. The Division Outreach Team came from Sacramento to offer support and host a Tread Lightly® RC Jeep obstacle course that enthralled over 1300 visitors of all ages. The outreach staff guided the participants over challenging obstacles while learning about OHV safety and Tread Lightly! principals, having fun and becoming a more responsible recreationist at the same time! In total, approximately 3900 visitors attended programs, forging new connections with their favorite place to play.



Photo by Miguel Rocha

Finally, overseeing the event from their perch on the Badlands Overlook, our public safety team kept a close eye on

The public safety team and allied agencies taking time for a photo after their morning briefing.



Photo by Andrew Ahlberg, Sector Superintendent

The Incident Command Trailer offers Supervising Ranger Russell Fortin a place to brief the officers of the multi-agency effort.

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Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari *continued...*

the event, with visitor safety as their ultimate goal. The Public Safety team used a Unified Command Structure, as well as our newly finished Incident Command trailer, to more effectively make use of our own and allied agency resources. Law enforcement rangers, desert lifeguards, and officers from the multi-agency effort were able to professionally handle any situation that arose. With an increase in



Photo by Andrew Ahlberg, Sector Superintendent

Using a Unified Command Structure, multiple agencies assist State Park rangers and lifeguards during an incident at the Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari

the number of law enforcement personnel this year, there were more minor citations issued, but due to the deterrent of more visible patrols, there were fewer serious incidents to report.

At the end of a long weekend, everyone was exhausted but happy with their efforts to make our visitor's experience at this event a memorable one. We look forward to hosting this event and many others in the years to come!

Ocotillo Wells Fun Fact...

Did you know...

Flat-tailed horned lizards capture ants with their sticky tongue—not by grabbing them with their jaws! They have been known to eat up to 200 ants in one day!



Meet Jeremy ...

Jeremy Freeman received his BA in anthropology at Heidelberg College and is an MA candidate in anthropology at Ball State University. He has worked as a professional archaeologist for over 19 years for cultural resource management firms, museums, universities, federal agencies, and non-profit research institutes throughout the US. He has a passion for archaeological public outreach and education and has been involved in the development and implementation of a variety of public outreach projects including: The Fallen Timbers Public Archaeology Project, the Archaeological Discovery Tour at Minnetrista Cultural Center and Oakhurst Gardens, the Next Step Education through Archaeology Project, the Experiential Learning through Historical Archaeology Project, Shumla Archaeological Research & Education Center, and Archaeology Learning Group where he is the founder and the Archaeological Program Coordinator. He has, likewise, taught classes at the collegiate level at Ball State University, Heidelberg College, and Owens Community College. He is currently serving as a member of the Society for American Archaeology's (SAA) Public Education Committee which is a biannual elected position. Other parks where he has worked include Joshua Tree National Park. His research interests include: rock art documentation and rock art conservation management, indigenous and nationalistic identities, public archaeology and outreach, and mythology and the sacred landscape.



Meet Patrick ...

Hello fellow desert inhabitants! My name is Patrick Streeter Parker III, (but you all can call me Pat or Streeter), and I am the new Environmental Services Intern on the Resources team here at OW. I originate from the small town of San Diego, California. A few of my favorite things are surfing, biology, and spearfishing. Some of my least favorite things are creosote tea, spray sunscreen, and used ketchup. You can find me in the Park Monday—Thursday, and sometimes even on Fridays studying OW's wildlife. On the weekends, I'll be out in the water! Now you know me, and I can't wait to meet you! See you all in the Park!



Astronomy Festival: The Sky Was the Limit

By Jan Naragon, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

March 17 was a special date for sun worshipers, astrophysics addicts, nebula nuts, and black-hole buffs! Visitors had twelve whole hours to celebrate the Colorado Desert's phenomenal skies at our annual Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies astronomy festival.

Galactic adventures began midmorning on the nature loop behind the Discovery Center with a scavenger-hunt-style tour of the solar system. Space travelers first peered through the solar telescope at our middle-aged star, the Sun, which is lookin' pretty good at 4.5 billion years of age. Planetary stations placed along the walk at their relative distances from the "sun" contained fast facts about the solar system and checkpoints that earned participants tickets for a gift drawing. Visitors to the Discovery Center tried their hand at matching landscapes on planets and moons to favorite places in Ocotillo Wells. Junior Ranger outer-space themes added to the interplanetary buzz. Families ventured down the highway to the Denner ATV Training Track for model rocket decorating and launch.

As shadows lengthened, visitors heard three "stellar" guest speakers who were well-versed in knowledge of exoplanets (remember Pluto?) and news from the edge of our solar system. Kin Searcy, senior docent at Palomar Observatory and a crowd favorite, shared tips on how backyard-sized telescopes could zone in these remote bodies. Steve Matousek of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory took time out of his work managing NASA's Juno mission to update the standing-room audience on fascinating exoplanets and new questions raised by the mission's data.

After his discussion of the likelihood of extraterrestrial life and some methods to detect it, John Garrett added two of his own large telescopes to OW's set of stellar scopes set up in Howling Meg Circle. The clear, moonless skies more than compensated for a few stray clouds to produce one of the best stargazing opportunities of the season. Guests dressed in layers after reading the wind forecast, and let their eyes and minds wander. We even heard some humming Monty Python's *Galaxy Song*.

Interpretive staffer Logan Poe introduced a new high-tech imager from his bag of stargazing tricks. This camera attaches to a telescope eyepiece and then projects an image to a screen for those who have difficulty seeing through the eyepiece. Says Logan, "It's a great way for the whole audience group to see exactly what's being picked up by a scope at that moment."



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“I come to play this every year...!”

By Seher Khan, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

“I come to play this every year with grandma!” announced a young girl as she received her Golden Scat Award, proudly placing the sticker onto her jacket. The Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari is now in its 56th year. As one of the longest running off-roading events in the region, TDS brings families back to Ocotillo Wells year after year, entwining the park into multigenerational family traditions...such as playing “Whose Scat is That” and earning a coveted Golden Scat Award!

Despite blustery conditions, the event received over 50,000 attendees on the weekend of March 2nd. Flanked by vendors offering everything from shocks to tent-trailers to wood fired pizzas, park interpretive staff offered visitors a peek into the life of the desert. Programs included desert dwellers (past and present), the forces of nature which shape the desert, and how to explore the desert responsibly.

One exhibit displayed fossil casts of prehistoric “Gnarly Beasts” who roamed the Borrego Valley. Visitors marveled at skulls of creatures as diverse as Imperial walruses and Shasta ground sloths. Some even tested their strength by picking up a 4-foot mammoth femur—made of foam! Modern desert animal displays showcased local snakes, mammals, and insects. Visitors had the chance to touch pelts and skulls, hold Darkling beetles, and watch a scorpion fluoresce under UV light.

Other displays highlighted the desert itself. At the flash flood display, visitors learned of the enormous power of water in this arid landscape. The solar telescope was a constant source of exclamation as visitors searched for, and happily found, solar flares. The Division Outreach Team came from Sacramento to offer support and host a Tread Lightly!® RC Jeep obstacle course which enthralled visitors of all ages. Navigating their RC jeeps around obstacles of rocks, delicate plants, and other vehicles, visitors learned how to reduce their impact as they explore the desert.

In total, approximately 3,900 visitors attended programs, forging new connections with their favorite place to play.

Astronomy Festival *continued...*

Starry-eyed festival-goers took the chill off at a hot-chocolate stand, then grabbed s’mores around a campfire. Thanks to Friends of Ocotillo Wells for keeping us all warm. Visitors at our stargazing programs always remark about how their perspectives get reset in the up-close-and-personal presence of our galaxy—“one of millions of billions in this amazing and expanding universe.”

OW Maintenance News

By Alfredo Jacobo, Park Maintenance Supervisor



In December Chris Dahl, Park Maintenance Worker I, installed three electric car charging stations—one in the District parking structure, one at the Ranger Station building, and the last one at Heber Dunes SVRA. Chris knows a lot about electric circuits and power panels!



Chris Dahl, Park Maintenance Worker I, Malcom Lumbart, Senior Maintenance Aide, and Richard Gutierrez, Senior Maintenance Aide, build the front and back deck for the new residence at Toner. Chris, who is leading the project, took Richard under his wings and passed to Richard his knowledge and tricks for building a deck.

Interp Salutes Volunteer Annette Maytorena

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I, and Jan Naragon, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

The Interpretation and Education Department has the good fortune to be able to call on a loyal band of volunteers to help us with special events, for whom we are always grateful. This past season, nearly every Junior Ranger Program got an infusion of energy from a new kid on the block—Annette Maytorena, daughter of OW Maintenance staffer Ana Anguiano. Annette is a senior at Borrego Springs High School and needed 30-50 hours of community service in order to graduate. As of this writing, she has contributed a whopping 230 volunteer hours working at Junior Rangers and at other events, including the Halloween Spooktacular, Critter Olympics, Kids Adventure Connection, Tierra Del Sol, Hot Stars Astronomy Fest, and Spring Eggs-travaganza.



Annette at Tierra Del Sol

Park Interpreter I Sharon Weil remembers reading Annette's application, which stated that she wanted to explore Park careers and fulfill her graduation requirement. When Sharon showed Annette a calendar of various weekends where she could use help, Annette offered her services every weekend. And she has gone above and beyond all expectations.

Annette radiates genuine care for kids and other visitors. She follows through on assignments with creativity and enthusiasm. She knows how to anticipate "the next question," be it from park guests or staff, and she can answer in two languages. Says Sharon, "in a very short time, Annette has gained the respect of the entire staff, and she is already beloved by many children who visit the park regularly with their families." Annette also keeps us up on popular culture, including useful phone apps, current events research, and music trends!

Annette gracefully juggles school demands, work at OW, crossfit training, and many outside interests. She is an avid reader and excels at crocheting. Annette's extended family is obviously important to her, making her an excellent role model for two younger sisters. (She also monitors the wild and crazy lifestyle of her pet turtles.) Annette will pursue training to become a massage therapist after she leaves Borrego. Her wisdom and social skills have already set her on a trajectory for success.

The trait that Sharon most admires about Annette is that she never, ever leaves until the assignment is done *and* the clean-up is complete. Annette is nearly always the last one out the door at the end of what can be a very long day.

To you, Annette, we say "Wow!" We are not sure if we can do without you!

Heber Dunes Happenings

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

A New Year Dawns



As the new year dawns, young NYPUM riders and an ATV Safety Class graduate warm up for the Annual Family Ride in the Heber Dunes' practice/training arena.

2018 got off to a rousing start as 13 members of the El Centro NYPUM (National Youth Project Using Mini Bikes) chapter joined ASI instructor, Jim Rue, and the new year's first class of ATV Safety graduates on an exciting Family Ride through the Park. A post-ride afternoon BBQ was just the right touch to wrap up a fun filled day of off-road adventures.

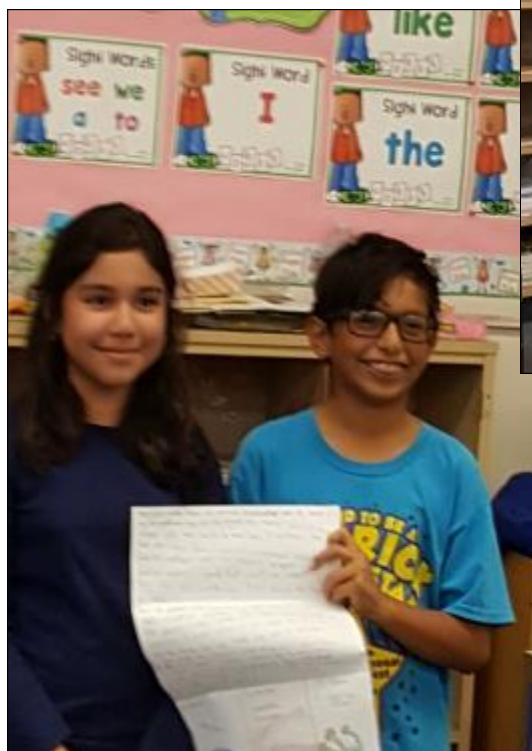


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Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

Team Decomposer

Afterschool Junior Rangers took their worm research to a whole new level when they were deputized as part of Team Decomposer and charged with cleaning up—naturally—their school campuses. Oh what tales were told



when Junior Rangers scripted their very own “Dirty Rotten Stinkin’ Stories.” Garbage was never so hilarious as when Team Decomposer came to town; deputized the scavengers, invertebrates, fungi, and bacteria; and hatched plans to save the schools from being buried in a mountain of trash!

Junior Rangers from Hedricks and Desert Garden share their “Dirty Rotten Stinkin’ Stories.”

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Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

Field of Dreams— Heber Dunes Style



Heber Dunes' campsite at the 2018 Mid-Winter Fair and Fiesta. Yes, there was a transformer malfunction and the lights did go out. If only that "campfire" had been hot enough to roast some marshmallows!

Remember when? Wouldn't it be fun to camp out at the park like we used to? Of the 99,630 visitors that attended the 2018 Mid-Winter Fair & Fiesta, 6,101 were invited to join Heber Dunes' staff and partners—NYPUM and HESD Ambassador Club—around the "campfire" to share their hopes and dreams for the Park. When the lights went out due to an electrical malfunction, the "campfire" continued to draw visitors, their songs, and their stories. The question remains—if we build it, will they come?

(Continued on next page...)

Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

Time Marches On



As the sun sets on the first quarter of 2018, much has been accomplished and much remains to be done. When Heber Dunes' Supervising Ranger James Claar arrived at the Park, his office was in a temporary modular building. As he rides off into retirement, the office he leaves behind is in a permanent modern structure.

Change is inevitable. May this change be everything that the Claar family hopes it will be.

Happy Trails!

To James—
As the sun rises so does it set.
May your retirement be as memorable as the beginning and
ending of a Heber Dunes' day.

Best Wishes from the Staff of Heber Dunes

Native Outplanting at Heber Dunes

By Danny McCamish, Environmental Scientist

Just a couple days after we finished ringing in the new year, Ocotillo Wells District Resource and Trails teams joined together to help beautify and increase native plant diversity and improve both the visual landscape and habitat at Heber Dunes SVRA.

Members of the District Trails team and local volunteers, under the direction of the Resources Department, helped replace non-native beetle-killed trees around the Heber Dunes Visitor Center with our local native honey-mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) and desert milkweed (*Asclepias erosa* and *subulata*) varieties.

The plants were grown from native seed stock, collected within the boundary of Ocotillo Wells SVRA. These native outplantings were grown by Resources staff at the OWSVRA native plant nursery for at least three years to prepare them for outplanting in the harsh desert environment.

You can recognize honey mesquite by its rounded crown and crooked, drooping branches with feathery foliage and straight, paired spines on twigs. This branching helps the mesquite to form its iconic sand dune habitat, called a hummock. Based on water availability, the mesquite may remain a low growing shrub forming dense thickets that are used as refuge by rabbits, quail, and even large animals, like the coyote or American badger. Mesquite is highly adapted to the arid desert environment with a very deep taproot to reach underground water sources. The fruit is a nutritious “bean pod” that is valued by many animals and was eaten by native people of the desert. (California Native Plant Society¹)



¹[http://calscape.org/Prosopis-glandulosa-\(Honey-Mesquite\)?srchcr=sc567cc9eb4ee8f](http://calscape.org/Prosopis-glandulosa-(Honey-Mesquite)?srchcr=sc567cc9eb4ee8f). 2018.

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Native Outplanting at Heber Dunes *continued...*

Desert milkweed species come in many forms. The Resources Department at Ocotillo Wells has cultivated the two most common low desert species at the native plant nursery and included them in our habitat beautification efforts at the Heber Dunes Visitor Center. Milkweed varieties are common in the desert and form stands of often 3-4" tall perennial flower clumps along washes and ditches. Their flowers form a variety of colors from cream to light green and grow in large clusters. These plants help increase insect diversity in the area, and, of course, are known to attract beautiful butterflies during the spring and fall.



After the trees were planted, crews installed rabbit-guard fencing around the saplings to ensure they will grow happily without being eaten by local critters. Over 40 plants in total were placed around the area for future generations to enjoy.

Now, while you ride at Heber Dunes, take a moment to stop by the Visitor Center and watch our native desert flora grow!

Meet Sabrena ...

Hi, my name is Sabrena Stembridge, and I'm very excited to join the Ocotillo Wells team as an archaeology specialist! I grew up in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, CA, and graduated from California State University, Northridge (CSUN) with a BA in anthropology and a minor in political science. I love traveling and seeing new places. Last summer I completed an archaeology field school in the Mojave Desert, and the high heat couldn't keep me away! This will be my first job with State Parks, and I know Ocotillo Wells is the perfect place to begin.



Kangaroo Rats: The Desert's Adorable Side

By Patrick Parker, Environmental Scientist Intern, Resources

During recent small mammal surveys at Ocotillo Wells, the Resources team got an up close look at this Merriam's Kangaroo Rat! The name "kangaroo rat" is actually a misnomer because these adorable creatures are more closely related to gerbils than rats.



Desert Kangaroo Rat, left, and Merriam's Kangaroo Rat, right



Ocotillo Wells SVRA is home to two species of kangaroo rats: the Merriam's and the Desert.

The Merriam's Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys merriami*) is rather small with usually a light brown or tan back. It is the smaller of the kangaroo rats found in the southwest.

The Desert Kangaroo Rat (*Dipodomys deserti*) is larger, and a very pale buff color. Its tail has a white tip and usually lacks a dark stripe on the underside.

Both of these kangaroo rats have four toes on their hind feet and travel by jumping in a bipedal manner.

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Kangaroo Rats: The Desert's Adorable Side *continued...*



Kangaroo rats are mostly nocturnal, so a daytime sighting is a very special thing! Most people often only see the tracks they leave behind in the sand the next day.

The Desert Kangaroo Rat's long legs can propel them across the desert floor at up to 10 feet per second, clearing as much as 6-9 feet in one leap! A kangaroo rat's long tail offers it incredible balance (much like that of a cheetah) allowing it to turn on a dime in order to evade predators. The perks of long hind legs don't stop there! This may seem crazy, but it turns out that hopping on two legs is a more energetically-efficient way of travelling over long distances—a valuable asset for a creature that must travel far and wide each night across the desert in search of seeds to eat. The same tactic is employed by kangaroos in Australia.



A Desert Kangaroo Rat hopping across the sand

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Kangaroo Rats: The Desert's Adorable Side *continued...*

We have been recapturing many of the same individual kangaroo rats in our small mammal surveys this spring at Ocotillo Wells. Some individuals are even recaptured in the same locations they were caught in last year! This suggests that adult kangaroo rats may establish home territories.



Kangaroo rats are incredibly water efficient. They do not need to drink water in the way that you and I do. In fact, they can meet their daily water needs entirely through the seeds that they eat! Imagine never having to drink a glass of water in your entire life! On top of this, they also contain a special oil in their coats which prevent water sweating (and therefore water loss). They keep cool by digging burrows and hiding out underground during the blistering hot desert days.

A Hopping Eggs-travaganza!

By Jan Naragon, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation and Education

Egg-zact planning went into a successful Springtime Eggs-travaganza on March 31. Under the watchful eyes of a Very Big Bunny, hundreds of egg hunters swarmed over the Soens Youth Training Track to collect eggs-cellent chocolates and other sweets, trying to beat the heat. Waiting parents noshed on breakfast treats and coffee.

After the egg hunts, kids of all ages eggs-ited to Howling Meg Circle for a series of springtime-themed games. And, yes, even more candy! Visitors had eggs-tra learning opportunities

outside in the guise of the *Which Rabbit Is Which?* game, and inside the Discovery Center with *Whose Egg Is That?*

Opportunities to win—yes—even

more candy were available at the ever-popular Spring-Go held in the Discovery Center classroom. Artistic types painted garden sticks to take home.



Thanks to all who participated in the concurrent Spring Clean-Up as part of their morning rides! We collected dozens of bags of garbage. And thanks to Norm Ritter and Friends of Ocotillo Wells for providing chili dogs for all who were still hungry.



Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect.

Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA



Events at Ocotillo Wells

Watch for special event weekends and interpretive programs beginning again in late October!



Ocotillo Wells District

5172 Highway 78, Box #10
Borrego Springs, CA 92004
Phone: (760) 767-5391
www.ohv.parks.ca.gov